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SUBJECT: CODEL Levin with Duma Foreign Relations Chairman Kosachev
on post-Start, Iran, and Missile Defense

Summary

1. (SBU) On April 15, State Duma International Relations Chairman Kosachev told Senators Levin, Collins, and Nelson that President Medvedev had issued instructions to finalize a post-START agreement by the end of the year. Although he stated that negotiators must re-link arms control and defensive systems, the disposition of removed warheads, and the number of U.S. carriers. He accepted cooperation on missile defense development in principle, avoided any specific commitments, and called for a joint threat assessment as a first step. He also shared his view of Russian security threats, putting terrorism high on the list, but dismissing the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program. He urged the U.S. to avoid provoking Iran into leaving the NPT and dismissing IAEA inspectors. Kosachev stated that Medvedev was firmly in charge of Russian foreign policy and that PM Putin gave advice but not instructions. End summary.

Post-START Negotiations

2. (SBU) In an April 15 meeting, State Duma International Relations Committee Chairman Konstantin Kosachev discussed with Senators Carl Levin, Susan Collins, and Bill Nelson prospects for U.S.-Russia relations, cooperation on missile defense, Russian views on security threats including Iran, and issues that must be addressed in post-START negotiations. Kosachev attended the April 2 G20 meeting with President Medvedev and reported that after the April 1 meeting with President Obama, Medvedev issued explicit instructions to the government on completing a framework agreement on a post-START accord by the July summit and finalizing a full text by December.

3. (SBU) Kosachev said that from the Russian perspective, post-START negotiators needed to resolve three issues: restoration of the linkage between arms control and anti-ballistic missile systems; clarification on what will be done with removed warheads (storage, re-use, or dismantlement); and the number of U.S. carrier groups. He was skeptical that the U.S. military would be flexible in negotiations. Senator Levin commented that Kosachev put too much value on the role of the U.S. military on policy-making and that it was important to reengage the military-to-military relationship.

Missile Defense and the Iranian Threat

4. (SBU) Senator Levin said that the main focus of the delegation's visit was to discuss the potential for developing joint missile defenses against the common threat posed by Iranian nuclear and missile programs. Kosachev reacted strongly to Levin's statements that in London, Medvedev had acknowledged that Washington's assessment of Iran's progress on missile development was more accurate than Russian assessments. "I confirm that in London, President Medvedev acknowledged that Russia underestimated Iran's development," but that the U.S. and Russia should have a better

dialogue, he said. He also noted that American information was "not always right," as demonstrated by events in Iraq.

¶5. (SBU) Kosachev called Iran an "uncomfortable partner" that was not transparent. He argued that Russia was not seeking to earn money through cooperation with Iran, pointing out that Germany had three times more trade with Iran than Russia did. He assessed that Iran had not yet decided on whether or not to move forward on its military program. "We have no proof that Iran violated the NPT. If we treat them as if they already have, we will provoke them to pursue a nuclear program. Just like North Korea." In his view, the best path was to maintain the presence of the IAEA within Iran.

¶6. (SBU) Kosachev also disagreed with U.S. assessments of Iranian missile development, commenting that the current stage was dangerous for Israel, but that the range of Iranian missiles was 2,000 kilometers, well short of being able to reach Warsaw. Referring to the exchange of letters between Presidents Obama and Medvedev, Kosachev said that a quid pro quo between Russia and the U.S. on missile defense and Iran was not sustainable and that the two sides should work to build trust and transparency.

¶7. (SBU) Senator Levin asked whether practical cooperation on missile defense, including sharing radar information and sites, was possible. Kosachev hedged, saying everything was possible, but that it needed to be taken step by step -- although he mentioned that Turkey was a more sensible location for missile defense assets. Avoiding direct comment on practical missile defense cooperation, Kosachev said that the two sides must instead revisit the linkage between offensive nuclear weapons and defensive systems, "START was done in a different environment of nuclear parity and under the blanket of the ABM treaty. It is not possible to carry forward in

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the same way." He continued that the U.S. dominated in conventional and nuclear forces and that there were voices in the Russian military that did not want to negotiate. He said, "We need to reach a workable and sustainable balance and not seek an agreement that provides greater efficiency for one side at the expense of the other."

¶8. (SBU) For Kosachev, the necessary first step in practical cooperation was the development of a joint threat assessment. "The military does not accept" the U.S. threat assessment and because I am not an expert, "I have to accept their view." While dismissing the ten to twenty proposed interceptors as "nothing," Kosachev called the deployment of a radar in the Czech Republic as "something different."

¶9. (SBU) Underlining his visits to Pyongyang and Tehran, Kosachev said that these two regimes were motivated by the threat of a U.S.-led regime change in their countries; they did not want a situation like Iraq. He argued that the leadership of these countries did not wish to strike the U.S. but to prevent an attack by the U.S. Kosachev blamed U.S. policies that ignored international law and the role of the UN as forming the basis of North Korean and Iranian concerns. Kosachev said it would be better to work to build better democracy and transparency in Iran. In reply to Senator Levin's appeal for assistance in accomplishing this, Kosachev said that when Russia repeats the importance of democracy and transparency, Iran counters that it does not want to end up like Iraq.

¶10. (SBU) Senator Levin pushed back saying that Iran had threatened the existence of another state, Israel; it had not been transparent with the IAEA, and it continued to support terrorism by funding HAMAS and Hizballah. Kosachev reflected that Israel had nuclear weapons and that Iran had no response; if Israel was to abandon its nuclear weapons, it could change the situation.

Russian Threat Assessment

¶11. (SBU) The primary threat facing Russia, Kosachev argued, was not Iran or proliferation but terrorism and religious extremism, followed by narcotics (especially from Afghanistan). Proliferation

and the possibility of a terrorist getting a weapon of mass destruction was a distant third place, because "frankly Russia is not likely to be the first target." Kosachev also said that Russia is still confronted by threats to its territorial integrity, including its declining population and its dependence on the export of raw materials.

¶12. (SBU) Senator Levin recommended that Kosachev add climate change to his list of threats. Kosachev responded that climate change was not on Russia's short list of threats, as it "was not a matter of any concern." He added that it may work to Russia's advantage by reducing the cost of transportation and easing access to petroleum resources in the far north.

Medvedev in Charge

¶13. (SBU) Responding to Senator Nelson's question on the potential personal chemistry between PM Putin and President Obama, Kosachev replied that Medvedev is "firmly in-charge of Russian foreign policy -- Putin provides advice but not instructions." He continued that of course there would be a meeting between the two during the upcoming meeting in July, but the relationship between Putin and President Obama was less important than that between the President and Medvedev.

¶14. (SBU) Commenting on decision-making during the war with Georgia, Kosachev admitted that Medvedev depended on Putin's advice and instructions then, but over time Medvedev had become more confident and independent. He was careful to point out that "Mr. Putin does not interfere because the tandem functions. Putin trusts Medvedev to make the right decisions."

¶15. (U) CODEL Levin did not clear this message.

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